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Washington Wonderland

Cuban Refugee Warns It 'Can Happen Here'

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 2 — A former Havana businessman who managed the Cuban Electric Power Company is currently lecturing throughout the hemisphere on the lesson we can learn from his unhappy homeland.

This eye-opening address effectively refutes the long-held theory that communism makes real headway only in city slums and underprivileged areas of the world.

Serafin G. Menocal, a graduate electrical engineer and former president of Cuba's National Council of Boy Scouts, says that the laboring class and farm workers were actually Fidel Castro's greatest stumbling block in his campaign to subvert Cuba.

THE EASIEST prey, he declares, were students, politicians, churchmen, and "businessmen who generally remained aloof from politics."

As a Rotarian and Lion's Club president in Cuba Mr. Menocal was in a position to know. With an engineer's precision he carefully documents the steps by which Castro took over his native land, and warns that unless others profit by those mistakes, it can happen here and in South America.

To prove his point that communism does not necessarily feed on poverty and illiteracy, he makes these interesting points about pre-Castro Cuba: Among Latin American countries Cuba ranked first per capita in TV broadcasting stations and receivers, motion picture attendance, and percentage of national income invested in education.

IT RANKED second in value of imports, exports, and radio receivers; third in income, number of newspapers and magazines, telephones, automobiles and electric power consumption per capita.

One of every five Cubans had a radio; one in 20 a TV set, and one in 27 an automobile. According to a U. S. government report Cubans were "among the better fed people of the world," before Castro. Cuba had the lowest mortality rate in the Western Hemisphere. Its industrial workers were protected by strong unions, and its farm workers by legislation which amounted to a profit-sharing arrangement. The pre-Communist island had an extensive public school system free from discrimination. It was cheaper and easier to get a college education in Cuba than the U. S.

"IT WAS not the illiterate or the poor who were responsible for the take-over by Castro," Menocal says, but those members of the middle and wealthy classes who were "too absorbed in their own pursuits" and liked the sound of Castro's promises.

Menocal, like many other educated Cubans, hated dictator Batista and wanted to depose him. They yearned for restoration of their constitution, honest elections and a government free from graft.

Then came Fidel Castro, riding the crest of Batista's unpopularity and promising everything to everybody. For a time he fooled many, including influential segments of the American press and our Central Intelligence agency.

Shortly after the Castro coup this correspondent, while interviewing CIA Director Allen Dulles, was flatly told: "Castro is not a Communist."

ON THE basis of information secured from a non-governmental source I nevertheless wrote that he was, and cited evidence of Castro's intimacy with the then-little-known Red, "Che" Guevara. A friend told me that at a top-level staff meeting at CIA recently my headlined article was produced, and an official commented: "I wish we'd said that."

Approximately a third of a million Cubans have fled their island, leaving behind possessions, homes and life-savings. Menocal is one of those who lost everything, but he is now vice president of American Foreign Power Co., the Latin subsidiary of Electric Bond and Share Co. Let us hope that he can awaken other businessmen of the hemisphere to the importance of keeping a watchful eye on their own governments.

Perhaps in Central and South America his appeal, based on personal experience, will carry more impact than any amount of chiding by our State Department. And let's not lull ourselves into thinking that "it can't happen here," too.

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